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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON SHARM EL-SHEIKH AND AQABA
SUMMITS

News Reports

-- All dailies on June 4 led with reports, continued on the inside pages, on the Sharm El-Sheikh summit. In his address, King Abdullah stressed that the Palestinian issue was the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that this was a historic opportunity for peace. President Bush's speech at the Sharm summit was reported in frontpage headlines. He was quoted saying that the world needs a Palestinian State and that a free trade zone within the Middle East should be established to guarantee stability. Another leading report mentioned that Jordan is hosting the Bush-Abbas-Sharon summit today in Aqaba and the mechanisms to implement the Roadmap will be discussed. The center-left, influential Arabic daily, Al-Dustour, led with the headline: "The King Hosts the 'Birth of A Palestinian State' Summit in Aqaba Today" All dailies noted that the differences on the issue of "terrorism" that delayed the Sharm El-Sheikh summit's opening session and caused some participating leaders to cancel the delivery of their scheduled speeches.

Other related frontpage reports said that Secretary of State Powell warned Palestinian President Arafat not to do anything that would obstruct the peace process. It was also reported that the Arab and U.S. statements in Sharm agreed on the rejection of terrorism and violence and called for concessions from Israel. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice was quoted as saying that President Bush did not ask for the return of the Egyptian and Jordanian ambassadors to Israel.

-- The G-8 Summit in Evian concluded. All dailies carried either frontpage or inside page reports on the conclusion of the G-8 summit, which issued a final communique stressing on the sovereignty of Iraq, expressing support for the Roadmap, and calling for the combat of terrorism.

Editorial Commentary

Editorial commentaries dealt with the Sharm and Aqaba summits. Commentators expressed cautious optimism over the U.S. stand on the Palestinian issue and considered the Aqaba summit a great historic opportunity for peace, calling for the exertion of decisive U.S. pressures on Sharon. Below are sample commentaries.

-- "What Will Happen At the Aqaba Summit?"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan wrote in independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (06/04): "There are negative and positive aspects of the road map. The first and most serious of those negative aspects is the existence of a right-wing extremist government, headed by Sharon, in Tel Aviv. A few weeks ago, Israel's prime minister said that he is not concerned with the Roadmap. One thing can only explain his presence in Aqaba today and that is, President Bush's strong pressures on him. One of the positive aspects of the summit is that the U.S. president, who sent his troops to occupy Iraq in the name of liberation and democracy is asked to put an end to the plight of the Palestinians."

Udwan continues: "The Aqaba summit is a great and historic opportunity for peace that will be crowned with an independent Palestinian state. However, we should not go overboard with our hopes and expectations. Wagering on decisive U.S. pressures on Sharon needs facts rather than analyses and hopes. Moreover, the continued existence of Sharon and a Likud government will remain a continuous threat to

the Roadmap and to empty it from its contents through Israeli maneuvers, hurdles, and procrastinations. However, we still must utilize this opportunity on a Palestinian and Arab level and this is what will happen at the Aqaba summit today."

-- "The Road Map At the Aqaba Summit"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek wrote on the back page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (06/04): "The presence of U.S. President Bush at the Sharm El-Sheikh and Aqaba summits is a sign of the United States' commitment this time. It also shows U.S. willingness to exert enough pressure to accept the Roadmap and to start implementing it without any amendments - but also taking into consideration Israel's fears as the president's reputation is standing a test and he does not want to register any failures on the eve of the next presidential elections."

Fanek continues: "If President Bush succeeds in achieving peace in the Middle East, then this will be a compensation for some of the negative repercussions of the aggression against Iraq and his success in this regard will serve the interests of all parties and will be an accomplishment that no one can deny."

He adds: "Bitter experiences in the past called for caution. We are much more pessimistic than optimistic and Sharon's acceptance of the Roadmap under pressure may just be a mere tactic, after which Sharon will jump at the first opportunity to back out and render the plan a failure."

-- "Will The Aqaba Summit Be A Turning Point?"

Daily columnist Rakan Majali wrote on the back page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/04): "We can say that President Bush came out of Sharm El-Sheikh summit, carrying reassurances to the Palestinians and Israelis that any agreement between them at the Aqaba summit will receive the world's blessings as expressed at the Evian summit and the Arabs' blessings as reflected at the Sharm summit."

Majali continues: "It is hoped that the Aqaba summit will be a turning point and, primarily, a starting point for the United States to regain some of its credibility, based on which a just and comprehensive peace can be built and Arab-U.S. relations can be improved. It is also the prelude to security and stability in the region."

-- "The Aqaba Summit"

Daily columnist Bassem Sakejha wrote on the op-ed page of the center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/04): "It is clear that the United States' way of dealing with the Israeli party will be put Washington's image in the region to the test after its occupation of Iraq."

He adds: "We are cautiously optimistic about the U.S. stand. Introductions do not always lead to logical results. The introductions these days indicate that George Bush does not need the Jewish vote to win in the next election. They voted against him in the past elections. He just came out of two great victories in Afghanistan and Iraq and he is enjoying world support for his Middle East plan. All this and that leads to a logical result, that is, pressure on Israel and imposing a solution in the region. But, as we have said, results may not always be logical."

Sakejha concludes: "It remains to be said that selecting Aqaba as a venue for the summit has a special significance. Jordan is the closest to the Palestinian issue and its role has always been pivotal. So, we should expect this role to increase in the coming days."

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